



Explanations

Basic usage

- What is always true: present + present
*If I **work** late, I **get** tired.*
*If the water **is boiling/has boiled**, it means the food **is** nearly ready.*
- What was always true: past + past
*We **went** home early if it **was** foggy.*
*If it **was snowing**, we **stayed** at home.*
- Real situations: present + future
Here we think that the outcome is really possible.
*If you **keep** driving like that, you're **going to have** an accident.*
*If you **see** Mark, tell him I'll **ring** him tomorrow.*
- Hypothetical situations: past + *would*
These are unreal or imaginary situations.
*If I **knew** the answer, I'd tell you.*
*If I **was having** a party, I **wouldn't** invite Marcia.*
The verb *be* usually takes the form *were* for all persons in these sentences, though *was* is used in everyday speech. Note that in the first person it is possible to use *should* instead of *would*.
*If I left home, I think I **should** be lonely.*
- Hypothetical past situations: past perfect + *would have*
These refer to past events.
*If I **had known** you were coming, I **would have met** you at the station.*
- With modals
Possible situations in the present
*If you get wet, you **should** change your clothes immediately.*
*If you come early, we **can** discuss the problem together.*
Hypothetical situations
*If I had the money, I **could** help you.*
Hypothetical past situations
*If you hadn't reminded me, I **might have** forgotten.*

Variations

- *If only*
This adds emphasis to hypothetical situations. With past events it adds a sense of regret. The second part of the sentence is often left out.
*If **only** I had enough time!*
*If **only** I hadn't drunk too much, this **wouldn't have** happened!*

■ **Unless** and other alternatives to *if*

Unless means *only if not*.

*I'll go ahead and get the tickets **unless** you call me this afternoon.*

(This means if you call me this afternoon, I won't get the tickets.)

This means if one situation depends on another, *if* can be replaced by *as/so long as*, *provided* or *only if*. See Grammar 13 for *only if*.

*I'll do what you say **provided** the police are not informed.*

Even if describes how something will happen whatever the condition.

***Even if** it rains, we'll still go for a picnic.*

■ Past events with results in the present: past perfect + *would*

*If Jim **hadn't missed** the plane, he **would** be here by now.*

■ *Should*

After *if*, this makes the possibility of an event seem unlikely.

*If you **should see** Ann, could you ask her to call me?*

(This implies that I do not expect you to see Ann.)

■ *Were to*

This also makes an event seem more hypothetical.

*If I **were to ask** you to marry me, what would you say?*

■ *Happen to*

This emphasises chance possibilities. It is often used with *should*.

*If you **happen to see** Helen, could you ask her to call me?*

*If you **should happen to be passing**, drop in for a cup of tea.*

■ *If it were not for/if it hadn't been for*

This describes how one event depends on another.

*If it **weren't for** Jim, this company would be in a mess.*

*If it **hadn't been for** their goalkeeper, United would have lost.*

■ *Will* and *would*: politeness and emphasis

These can be used as polite forms.

*If you **will/would wait** here, I'll see if Mrs Green is free.*

Will can also be used for emphasis, meaning 'insist on doing'.

*If you **will** stay out late, no wonder you are tired! (insist on staying out)*

■ *Supposing, otherwise*

Supposing or *suppose* can replace *if*, mainly in everyday speech.

***Supposing** you won the football pools, what would you do?*

Otherwise means 'or if not'. It can go at the beginning or end of the sentence.

*If you **hadn't given us** directions, we **wouldn't have found** the house.*

*Thanks for your directions to the house. We **wouldn't have found it otherwise**.*

Other ways of
making a
conditional
sentence

■ *But for*

This can replace *if not*. It is used in formal language, and must be followed by a noun form.

If you hadn't helped us, we would have been in trouble.

***But for your help**, we would have been in trouble.*

■ *If so/if not*

These can refer to a sentence understood but not stated.

*There is a possibility that Jack will be late. **If so**, I will take his place.*

■ Colloquial omission of *if*

An imperative can be used instead of an *if* clause in everyday speech.

***Sit down**, and I'll make us a cup of tea. (If you sit down ...)*

■ *If* and adjectives

In expressions such as *if it is necessary/possible* it is possible to omit the verb *be*.

***If interested**, apply within.*

***If necessary**, take a taxi.*

■ Formally *if* can mean *although*, usually as *if* + adjective.

*The room was well-furnished, **if a little badly decorated**.*

Practice

1 Put each verb in brackets into an appropriate verb form.

- a) Now we're lost! If you had written down (write down)
Mary's directions, this (not/happen).
- b) Why don't we emigrate? If we (live) in
Australia, at least the weather (be) better!
- c) I'm afraid that Smith is a hardened criminal. If we
..... (not/punish) him this time, he
..... (only/commit) more crimes.
- d) Thanks to Dr Jones, I'm still alive! If it
(not/be) for her, I (be) dead for certain.
- e) I'm sorry I can't lend you any money. You know that if I
..... (have) it, I
..... (lend) it to you.
- f) Don't be afraid. If you (touch) the dog,
it (not/bite).
- g) In those days, if you (have) a job, you
..... (be) lucky.
- h) It's always the same! If I (decide) to
leave the office early, my boss (call)
me after I've left!
- i) What a terrible thing to happen! Just think, if we
..... (not/miss) the plane, we
..... (kill) in the crash.
- j) Did you enjoy your meal? If you (finish)
eating, I (clear away) the plates.

2 Decide whether each sentence is grammatically possible or not.

- a) If you haven't received a letter yet, you haven't got the job. possible
- b) If it isn't for David, we are missing the bus.
- c) If it's raining, we go to the pub on the corner instead.
- d) If you didn't lend us the money, we would have gone to the bank.
- e) If you should happen to change your mind, drop me a line.
- f) If it wasn't for the rain, we would have been home by now.
- g) If you will drive so fast, no wonder the police keep stopping you.
- h) If I knew you were coming, I would have met you at the airport.
- i) But for you helped us, we would have taken much longer.
- j) If Jack joins the team, I'm leaving.

3 Finish the sentences by ticking the correct option (a–c).

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1) If you'd told me you were coming | a) I can get some food in. |
| | b) I'd have found us something to eat. ✓ |
| | c) I made a lovely dish. |
| 2) If you're too ill to come | a) I'll come over and see you. |
| | b) I wouldn't have done all this for you. |
| | c) I asked someone else. |
| 3) If I'd known you weren't coming | a) I wouldn't be very upset. |
| | b) I would like to know why. |
| | c) I wouldn't have gone to so much trouble. |
| 4) If you're not coming | a) perhaps you'd have the courtesy to tell me. |
| | b) we'd never have met. |
| | c) you'd be so lucky. |
| 5) If only you'd come | a) I'll be the happiest girl alive. |
| | b) I'd have had a lovely time. |
| | c) I would look forward to it. |
| 6) If you do decide to come | a) the party's always a success. |
| | b) I won't be coming either. |
| | c) let me know. |
| 7) If you really don't want to come | a) I'll understand. |
| | b) I can't be sure. |
| | c) tell me tomorrow. |

4 Complete each sentence with a phrase containing the verb in brackets in an appropriate form.

- If I were *to say* I (say) loved you, what would you do?
- If it (rain) I would have gone out for a walk.
- If you'd told me it was a surprise party, I (say) anything to Uncle Dave!
- Thanks for your help with the garden; I (do) otherwise.
- If only Mick had come to the disco, then we (have) a great time!
- (pay) the phone bill today, the phone will be cut off.
- If I (had) your tools, I wouldn't have been able to fix the car.
- Those wires look a bit dangerous; (touch) if I were you.
- If (be) the goalkeeper's heroics, we would have lost the match.

5 Rewrite each sentence three times so that it contains the word in capitals.

- a) We won't go away if the weather is bad.

We'll go away unless the weather's bad.

UNLESS

ONLY

STAY

- b) If you hurry up you won't be late.

DON'T

OR

WANT

- c) If they offered you the job, would you accept?

WERE TO

SHOULD

HAPPENED

- d) Without your help, I would have given up years ago.

HADN'T BEEN

BUT

HADN'T HELPED

- e) I'll lend you the money on condition that you pay it back next week.

PROVIDED

LONG

ONLY

6 Complete the text by writing one word in each space.

Mr Jeffries, I have decided against a prison sentence in your case. You may walk free from this court on (1) *condition* that you report to Chesham police station every Friday for the next six months. Should you fail to (2) so, you will be given one warning; and if you persist (3) failing to meet this obligation, you will return to this court for a harsher sentence. (4) you can present good reason why you were unable to report to the station, you will (5) yourself in severe trouble. If you are (6) to attend because of illness, please note that a medical certificate must be produced, signed by your doctor, proving your state of health. You should realise that (7) for your previous good conduct, I would (8) had no hesitation in imposing a prison sentence. And I shall not forget that if your friend had (9) intervened in the fight, you might (10) seriously injured the defendant.

7 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given.

- a) I didn't have the money so I didn't buy a new suit.

would

If I *had had the money I would have bought* a new suit.

- b) If you are in London by any chance, come and see me.

happen

If you come and see me.

- c) If you insist on doing everything yourself, of course you'll feel tired!

will

If you , of course you'll feel tired!

- d) Please take a seat, and I'll inquire for you.

will

If you , I'll inquire for you.

- e) If you do the shopping, I'll cook lunch.

and

You I'll cook lunch.

- f) If Pauline hadn't been interested, the project would have been abandoned.

interest

But the project would have been abandoned.

- g) The fire was brought under control thanks to the night-watchman.

for

If it hadn't got out of control.

- h) Dick is in prison because a detective recognised him.

if

Dick wouldn't recognised him.

- i) I am not tall enough to reach the shelf.

taller

If I reach the shelf.

- j) But for Helen acting so wonderfully, the play would be a flop.

wonderful

If it the play would be a flop.

- k) It won't make any difference if City score first; United will still win.

even

United City score first.

- l) Getting up early makes me feel hungry.

get

If makes me feel hungry.

- 8 Using the notes as a guide, complete the letter. Use one or two words in each space. The words you need do not occur in the notes.

YELLOW BRICK ROAD RECORD COMPANY

MEMO

Brian, tell Carter's again that their account must be paid.

If they don't pay in ten days we're going to have to go to the law.

If they're in financial trouble, they can get in touch with our Finance Dept.

If they pay up we can keep their account open.

If they don't we shall, if we really have to, close their account.

If they have settled the account already, say sorry for this letter.

Credit Controller

Carter's Record Store

Dear Sir/Madam,

We would like to (1) *remind*..... you that your account is two months overdue. On the basis of our goodwill, we are prepared to allow you another ten days to settle your account. However, if you (2) to pay your outstanding bills within ten days you (3) us with no alternative but to take legal action. That is,

(4) we receive full payment by 20 March, we

(5) steps to reclaim our money, plus compensation costs.

(6) you be experiencing financial difficulties, please contact our Finance Department. (7) that you settle your account within the specified time period, we

(8) happy to continue to do business with you.

However, we will, if (9) , take the regrettable step of closing your account. We are sorry that the situation has come to this, but if you had paid your bills over the last two months, we would not be in this position now.

You (10) have settled your account in the last two days; if so, please accept our apologies for this letter.

Yours faithfully,

Brian Eccles

Customer Services

Yellow Brick Road Record Company

→ SEE ALSO

Grammar 9: Unreal time

Grammar 10: Consolidation 2

Grammar 13: Inversion